

6 Tuesday, January 15, 2008 Daily Sound

# OPINION

## A new vintage a la Firestone

There was a tasting last week of the latest Firestone vintage, Vin du Greka. It's a very full-bodied wine, with a nose of petroleum, and a lovely rainbow-colored oil-slick finish.

Bottling has been something of a challenge, according to every political, environmental and toxic materials committee, as the aging vats which contain not wine, but glopmy crude oil, repeatedly spill the fruits of Greka's labor onto the ground and into those "ancient riverbed" creeks. Rather than glass bottles with pretty labels, Vin du Greka comes in white plastic sludge bags, which pile up nicely for transport, but are somewhat unwieldy for a wine cellar, and just won't hold a cork.

At a December meeting of the County Supervisors, Janet Wolf was so taken with this problematic petrol, she dared to suggest the Board receive a report from the staff and interested parties as to how this vintage wound up running down the creeks, rather than heading to the stores. For the record, Wolf's request to receive information from the staff and interested parties as an ex-agenda emergency hearing was voted down by Supervisors Centeno and Firestone, something, I'm told, that hasn't happened in the memory of those in attendance.

Where was the County staff's oversight and outrage prior to the Santa Maria "new-goo release" on December 7th? With literally hundreds of prior "spills" over the years, surely the Supervisors would have asked for a thorough investigation.

Perhaps they wanted to keep that vintage to themselves, but then it happened again, only this time on boss man Brooks' own Winery property. Initially, the oily dram was described insignificantly, like a small boutique wine; hardly worthy of the attention of a 'new release' Beaujolais.

Then, with a challenging twist of rationale, the vintner-turned-Supervisor blamed the spills on



**LORETTA REDD**

increasing regulatory oversight. As Mr. Firestone explained to William Etling in a recent and thorough [edhat.com](http://edhat.com) article, "Now, if we become unreasonable and politicize, and get hysterical about this, I ask myself, who is the next operator that will take over from these and will they have even less resources, less ability to

handle the affairs of Oil in a responsible way?"

Help me out here...it's because they apparently need more oversight that we should demand less oversight? I think the Supervisor might want to lower the octane rating on his bottles, because according to the County Fire Department, there have been 400 incidents of Greka vintage spilling out into the fields since 1999- totaling well over half a million gallons, or almost 100 tanker trucks worth of goo. That's enough to get half the population of North County more than a little tipsy.

For protection, each of the holding tanks is supposed to have a "containment pond" that can hold one-and-a-half times the volume of Vin du Greka...except this time, when rainwater apparently filled up the moat, or when the alarm doesn't work, or when the tank has rusted, or when the HMS Electric Protection folks are so high on the latest varietals, they are completely asleep at the switch.

Enter Mike Stoker, Greka spokesman, conservative candidate and wine connoisseur of these particular petroleum varietals, who apparently suspects terrorist activity to have caused these latest mishaps. Stoker intends to submit an investigation report compiled by his hired-gumshoe, retired FBI agent to suggest something was done to the 'barrels' and sensors in order for the spill to occur. Ah, anything to distract the drinking public.

With "no direct revenue to the County from oil produced" in the

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## A message from Fess Parker

It was clearly stated to the Rotary Club of Santa Barbara on Friday January 4, 2008, that I signed a contract to build the hostel, and I will build it as required. I believe there is an overriding concern which, if left unchecked, will affect everyone in the community. I ask you: is there a greater benefit to the community in building a hostel, or in using funds from the sale of the land towards gang violence prevention?



**PARKER**

The community must call for redirection of these assets if they believe it is the right thing to do. Due to contractual obligations the construction of the hostel must begin on March 1, 2008. The contracts will be honored, unless relief is granted by the Coastal Commission. Specifics of the assets to which I refer:

If the hostel isn't built, and the zoning on the property is changed to residential/commercial, it can be sold today for approximately \$3.5 million, all of which will go towards

gang violence prevention. Following the opening of my new hotel in the fall of 2009, we will contribute \$500,000 each year, for 5 years, toward the same. All of this money, over \$5 million, could be directed toward the prevention of gang violence for the good of the whole community. Furthermore, I would encourage the business community to follow my lead, providing more resources to attack this problem.

This is not about "Fess Parker" making a buck. In reality, I would be losing hundreds of thousands of dollars already spent on the hostel project in plans and architects, etc. ... This is about the community of Santa Barbara rallying around a sense of self-preservation. It presents the community with a clear, responsive action. A choice is before us; do we act, or not?

I don't pretend to be an expert on how to handle a gang problem. How exactly the money would be spent could be decided by the City Council, or a non-profit board. I hope that a great deal of the money would go toward an increased police presence downtown, but there are also other programs, both available

and needed, to help keep these troubled juveniles involved in something other than gangs.

My idea may have come too late. We have little time to act before the hostel land is built upon. The idea is intended to be a spark which can start the fire of public support, and more importantly, public action. We need participation and commitment from everyone in the community to make and implement this kind of fundamental change. The first thing we can all do is to call our City Council and the Coastal Commission to voice our support for the idea.

Our action could change life in Santa Barbara, benefiting every member in the community. Santa Barbara can become a community intolerant of violence, which takes responsibility for its own social issues, and takes action... or it can continue on its current course with no proposed solutions to this issue. Maybe our actions could also plant the seeds of change in other communities nearby, which are also plagued with gang violence. We will never know what is possible until we try.

— Fess Parker